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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PINR](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: TALABANI CHARACTERISTICALLY ROSY ON CABINET,
NEIGHBORS, CONFRONTING IRAN

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Iraqi President Jalal Talabani on April 23 met with the Ambassador and S/I Satterfield. Talabani was characteristically upbeat on engaging Iraq,s moderate neighbors, specifically Kuwait, Turkey, and Egypt, and likewise on bringing Fadilah, Iraqiyya, and Tawafuq back into government. He said the GOI has discussed sending a delegation to Tehran, led by Prime Minister Maliki but including members of all major political parties, to present evidence of Iranian meddling in Iraq directly to the Supreme Leader, but said the idea at this moment remains hypothetical. Less encouragingly, Talabani seemed to accept at face-value reports that American snipers are executing children in Sadr City and asked that the Coalition pull them back; the Ambassador emphatically rejected this accusation. End summary.

All Parties Returning to Cabinet?

¶2. (C) Talabani offered a characteristically rosy assessment of progress toward reuniting the national unity government. He claimed to have persuaded Fadilah earlier that day to return to the cabinet, but clarified that Fadilah has not yet discussed ministerial posts with the Prime Minister, suggesting more work remains. He spoke also to Iraqiya representatives, who said their only demand before rejoining the cabinet is that Maliki renounce the accusation that Iraqiya leader Iyad Allawi has ties to Shia militant group Jund al-Sama. Talabani remains upbeat on Tawafuq,s return as well, though he noted the front,s internal discord over who will assume the vacant Deputy Premiership and Khalaf Ulayan,s threat to part ways unless he gets the job.

Plans to Engage Neighbors and Confront Iran

¶3. (C) The President was similarly sanguine on improving relations with Iraq,s neighbors. First, Talabani said Maliki held an amicable meeting with Kuwaiti Amir Sabah during last week,s Neighbors, Conference. Second, he said Turkey had agreed that day to staff the bilateral High Committee agreed upon during Talabani,s March visit to Ankara, and proposed that Turkey could reprise its long history of counterbalancing Iran. Third, Talabani said Egypt is preparing to activate a parallel committee, similarly agreed upon during Talabani,s November trip to Cairo. Finally, the President said that morning,s Presidency Council meeting had agreed Maliki should visit Amman, a recommendation the Ambassador endorsed. The Ambassador further encouraged the GOI to fast-track the confirmation process for Iraq,s ambassadors to Arab countries, many of whom are stuck in a backlog of nominees for ministerial and other posts.

¶4. (C) The Ambassador condemned Iran,s conduct of bilateral relations with Iraq via the Qods Force, instead of through

normal diplomatic channels, and encouraged the GOI to pronounce this unacceptable. Talabani suggested a four-part strategy to exploit growing frustration with Iranian intervention in Iraq: a) wean a succession of Shia groups from the Iranian umbrella; b) align all parties behind the GOI and against the Sadrists; c) mobilize the population and Shia clerics against Iran, and d) court Turkey as a counterweight. Excepting this last, he gave no particulars on how to realize these ambitious goals, but did say unspecified GOI leaders are discussing a Maliki-led delegation to Tehran, comprising members of all major parties, to present the Supreme Leader damning evidence of Iranian lethal aid. Talabani noted, however, that this idea remains in its infancy.

Concurrence on How to Negotiate SFA

15. (C) The Ambassador praised Maliki's plan for Muhammad Hajj Hammoud, Iraq's chief SOFA negotiator, to coordinate regularly with the five deputies of the Executive Council principals who will negotiate much of the SFA. The Ambassador noted that Hammoud's team is not suited to handle political (vice technical) negotiations, but such cooperation would benefit both teams. He added that the Secretary had agreed with Maliki in Kuwait that negotiations would proceed on two tracks, with two negotiating teams, but culminate in a single document per the PM's wishes. Talabani said this arrangement reflected Presidency Council thinking, and noted that Maliki planned to be personally engaged in the SFA negotiations, rather than relying on a deputy. Maliki's briefings, he said, will be the Executive Council's primary means of tracking progress. Finally, he advised the Ambassador to focus on getting Vice President Tariq

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al-Hashemi's support for the SFA, which would come with greater difficulty than Maliki's.

Crediting Reported U.S. Atrocities in Sadr City

16. (C) Talabani credulously relayed reports from a parliamentary delegation to Sadr City -- of which his niece Ala Talabani was a member -- that U.S. military snipers are killing children, and asked that the Coalition pull its snipers back. The Ambassador responded that U.S. soldiers definitely were not responsible, stressing that our snipers are among our most careful and highly-trained soldiers. (Note: these rumors have emerged from Sadr City through a variety of channels in recent weeks.)
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